

Hunt-Phelan Residence
Memphis, Tennessee.

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HABS NO. 19-3

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO. 19

Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Frazer Smith, District Officer
36 So. Evergreen, Memphis, Tenn.

HUNT-PHELAN HOUSE
533 Beale Avenue
Memphis, Shelby County
Tennessee

Owner: Mr. Hunt-Phelan.

Date of Erection: Before 1830 (see following page); about 1832
(see Drawings).

Architect: No record.

Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Fair.

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction: Brick.

Other Existing Records: See text; see also History of the Homes
and Gardens of Tennessee by the Garden Study Club of Nashville.

Additional Data: See following pages.

HUNT-PHELAN HOUSE
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The Hunt-Phelan was developed in two stages,-

- (1) It was originally square in plan - four rooms, with hall between, comprising the main portion, and a small portico facing north (now east side). The builder and architect is not known.
- (2) The house and property was bought around 1830 by Colonel Driver, grand-father of the present owner, who moved the small Greek portico to the east side; he built the present large portico on the north side and added a kitchen and service wing.

The property at that time included the whole block in the center of which the house was located; it also included a large portion of the block adjoining on the west side (Driver Street not existing at that time) and facing Beale where large barns, stables, etc. were located. Colonel Driver owned many fine horses. Westward and to the rear of the house facing north were located two servants' houses or slave quarters. Directly west of the house was a large swimming pool built by Colonel Driver; this was destroyed when Driver Street was cut through the property. South of the swimming pool was a small house containing a furnace in which resin and cotton seed were burned to produce illumination gas for the mansion. It took about twenty-four hours of steady burning to produce enough gas to light the house for one evening's entertainment. To the south east from the house extended a large flower garden laid out in irregular small rounded beds edged with boxwood, two large cedar trees framed the north entrance. The whole property was defined by a large dense hedge of Cherokee roses. The front drive was similar to the present one though larger and was lined with various kinds of trees. So far as can be determined the house was originally of unpainted red brick with white trim.

During the Civil War when Grant's soldiers occupied Memphis, General Grant made this house his headquarters. The house before this time was filled with very fine furnishings, when the family was forced to move out they were allowed one freight car of furniture. When they returned the house was completely empty of all furnishings. The furniture that was saved in the freight car still remains in the house to-day.

Another unusual feature in this house is a silver closet in the dining room, which is completely lined with one-eighth inch steel plates.

The house is at present owned and occupied by Mr. Hunt-Phelan, a grandson of Colonel Driver.

Reviewed by H.C.F.
1936.

Author Lucian M. Dent,

Approved 

Driver-Hunt-Phelan House
(Hunt-Phelan Residence)
533 Beale Avenue
Memphis
Shelby County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-19-3

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An addendum to:

Hunt-Phelan Residence
Memphis, Tennessee
Shelby County
(as recorded in the 1930s)

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
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DRIVER-HUNT-PHELAN HOUSE
(Hunt-Phelan Residence)

HABS No. TN-19-3

Addendum to:

Hunt-Phelan Residence
Memphis, Tennessee
Shelby County
as recorded in the 1930s

Addendum to two data pages previously transmitted to the Library of Congress

Location: 533 Beale Avenue, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

Present Owner and
Occupant: Mr. Stephen R. Phelan and Rear Admiral George R. Phelan

Present Use: Residence

Significance: One of Memphis' outstanding ante-bellum residences, this house was begun about 1840. It was a pacesetter in elegance of style and was noted for innovations in heating and lighting systems. The house exists today much as when originally built.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: About 1840.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: This lot was initially conveyed by the South Memphis Company to George H. Wyatt for \$1,300.00, probably in 1839. The early records of this development company were destroyed by fire; its affairs were settled by a Chancery Court decree in Somerville (Fayette County) in 1845. The South Memphis Company trustees under this decree were Robertson Topp, Nathaniel Anderson, and William L. Vance. The most detailed story of this company's activities before 1845 is to be found in a biographical sketch of Vance in Keating's History of the City of Memphis. Vance here states that the 414 acre South Memphis tract was, in 1838, "in dense timber and undergrowth from Union Street to the south boundary." He surveyed the subdivision, supervised the clearing of streets so that prospective buyers would see the land offered, and began to sell lots in 1839-1840. It is reasonable to assume that Wyatt bought one of the first offered. He was a member of the committee to locate the western terminus of the LaGrange and Memphis Railroad in South Memphis; if not a stockholder, he was undoubtedly a supporter of the South Memphis Company.

The first recorded deed to this property is from the South Memphis Company trustees to the Union Bank of Tennessee for the consideration of "\$1300.00 paid by George H. Wyatt." This conveyance appears to have settled the unrecorded title Wyatt held to the property, and an unrecorded indebtedness of Wyatt to the Union Bank. The bank promptly sold the premises (plus two town lots) for \$7000.00; this deed mentions the "former residence of George H. Wyatt."

In 1850 the third owner sold the property to Eli M. Driver. No subsequent sale has been made since then, and ownership is still in the hands of Driver's descendants.

The following is the chain of title for this house. The sources are Register of Deeds, Shelby County and Will Books, Shelby County:

1839-40 South Memphis Company

to

George H. Wyatt for \$1,300.00 for one lot

1845 Deed August 9, 1845, recorded October 13, 1845,
in Book S page 384 (5.77 acres - \$1300.00)
Robertson Topp, Nathaniel Anderson, and
William L. Vance (Trustees of the South Memphis
Company)

to

President, Directors, and Company of the Union
Bank of the State of Tennessee

1845 Deed December 8, 1845, recorded July 6, 1846 in
Book U page 24 (5.77 acres with residence, plus
Lots 53 and 54 - \$7000.00)
Union Bank of Tennessee

to

Jesse M. Tate

1850 Deed July 12, 1850, recorded July 24, 1850 in
Book 5 page 512 (5.77 acres - \$8250.00)
Jesse M. Tate

to

Eli M. Driver

1856 Lease May 22, 1856, recorded June 4, 1856 in
Book 24 page 76
Giles L. Driver and William R. Hunt (Executors of
Eli M. Driver, deceased)

to

T. Logwood

1859 Release November 18, 1859, recorded December 7,
1859 in Book 40 Part 2 page 318
T. Logwood

to

Giles L. Driver and William R. Hunt

- 1872 Will January 26, 1872, recorded June 26, 1872 in
Will Book 6 page 98
William R. Hunt
to
Sarah E. Hunt (wife) and Julia F. Hunt (daughter)
- 1906 Will June 30, 1892, recorded February 23, 1906 in
Will Record 19 page 475
Julia Hunt Phelan
to
Sarah E. Hunt (mother)
- 1919 Will November 17, 1916, recorded August 7, 1919
in Will Record 31 page 63
Sarah E. Hunt
to
William Hunt Phelan and Julian Edward Phelan
(grandsons)
- 1942 Will October 6, 1941, recorded July 31, 1942 in
Will Record 54 page 76
William Richardson Hunt Phelan
to
Anne Rice Phelan (wife - life estate); on her
death to George R. Phelan and Stephen R. Phelan
(sons)

4. Alterations and additions: The house was originally square and had a small Doric portico on its north front. During the ownership of Eli M. Driver (1850-56), the Doric portico was moved to the east side, the large Ionic portico was constructed on the north front, a service wing (porch) was built on the south side, and a two-story service building was built on the west side.

According to an account published by the Western Sanitary Commission in 1864, William Hunt spent over \$40,000 for improvement work, including landscape beautification.

There was also a two-story frame barracks added during the Civil War when the Western Sanitary Commission operated a rest home for Union soldiers; this was later torn down.

- B. Historical Context: William R. Hunt was a colonel in the Confederate Army and a close personal friend of President Jefferson Davis. During the war he was in charge of the Atlanta Arsenal and of its reincarnation at Selma, Alabama. Memphis was occupied by Union forces early in the war, and for ten weeks in 1862 the mansion was headquarters for General Ulysses S. Grant. Thus the family and the home had associations with the highest echelons of both governments during the war era. William Richardson Hunt Phelan was born in Louisville, Kentucky, where the family had fled from the yellow fever epidemic of 1873; he was held by Mrs. Jefferson Davis, another Memphis refugee, as he was christened with the name of his late grandfather. The most factual account of this home, subject to the above strictures regarding its date and early ownership, is the 1949 article by Robert Talley.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: See Significance statement on page 3.
2. Condition of fabric: Generally in good condition, although there is some deterioration due to some neglect.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The overall dimensions of the main block of the house are 52'4" east to west x 46'-4" from north to south. There are a 15' deep service porch on the south side of the block (circa 1850-51) and a 52'-9" (north-south) x 19'1" (east-west) service building (circa 1855) extending south at the west end. The house is two stories high and has a low hip roof. The north (front) facade is five bays wide.
2. Walls: The brick walls have a stucco base and stucco cornice.
3. Structural system, framing: The brick masonry walls support a timber joist system.
4. Porches: The north Ionic portico, which extends through two stories, was built in circa 1850-52, when the small Doric porch presently on the east side was moved from the front. The Ionic portico has columns with wood shafts and cast-iron bases and caps. The Ionic entablature is of wood. The Doric porch is of wood and has an Ionic entablature. The south porch extends the full width of the house and is in two levels.
5. Chimneys: There are four stucco covered brick chimneys on the house. They are located on the east and west exterior walls.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entry doorway is on the north front; its door has two vertical wood panels and is separated from multi-pane sidelights by columns. The composition has a multi-pane transom over. Other entrances are located on the east and south sides.
- b. Windows: Window openings have stone sills, wood lintels and are shuttered. They have 6/6 light wood sash.

7. Roof: The building has a low hip roof (ridge circa 4' long east to west). It is topped with a raised seam tin surface. There is a deep box cornice which has port hole vents.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The main building is essentially a simple box in plan. A central hall extends through the building from the north front to the south rear. To its west are a drawing room and a library. To its east are two parlors separated by a stairhall which gives access to the second floor and to the east doorway. The second floor has four chambers and it reflects the first floor plan. To the south of the house, at the west end, is a two-story service building built with a shotgun plan containing a pantry, kitchen and laundry on the first floor and three servant rooms on the second. It was built in circa 1855.
Ceiling heights: First floor: 12'-11";
Second floor: 11'-3-1/2"

2. Stairways: The main stairway is located on the north wall of the stairhall. It has a landing and return on the south wall. At the south end of the central hall on the second floor is a stairway to the attic.

The service building has a dog-leg stair in the northwest corner of the kitchen.

3. Flooring: Wood boards and inlaid wood flooring; wood baseboard.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls and ceilings. The first floor hall is wallpapered with a column motif to reflect the design of the portico. There are cornice moldings.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Doors are 3'-3" x 7'-9" and have two vertical panels. They have paneled jambs. The door trim is of flat board with corner blocks.
- b. Windows: The windows have wood under-panels and paneled jambs.

6. Decorative features and trim: The mantels on the first floor are of marble; those on the second floor are of wood. The exception is the mantel in the southeast corner first floor room which is of wood.

7. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: The building has a hot air system; cast-iron lot air registers with marble tops were a part of this early system and are still in use.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The building is located in an urban renewal area of south Memphis. It is located on a 4.88 acre (originally 5.88 acres) tract, which is densely overgrown. There are the remains of a garden on the south side of the property. Some apartments were built at the southeast corner of the lot in the early 1900s.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: There is a good engraving of this house as it appeared toward the close of the Civil War, published as the frontispiece of the Western Sanitary Commission report cited below.

B. Bibliography:

- 1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Property records. Register of Deeds, Shelby County and Will Books, Shelby County. (No address given.)

- 2. Secondary and published sources:

Brandau, Roberta Seawell, ed. History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee. Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1936, pp. 316-7.

Forman, Jacob Gilbert. The Western Sanitary Commission:
A Sketch of its Origin, History, Labors for the Sick and
Wounded of the Western Armies, and Aid Given to Freedmen and
Union Refugees, with Incidents of Hospital Life. St. Louis:
Published for the Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair by
R. P. Studley and Company, 1864.

Talley, Robert. "Hunt Phelan House Still Stands After 114 Years,
Do You Know Location Of The Historic Building?" Memphis
Commercial Appeal (August 7, 1949).

Prepared by: Richard H. Hulan
Project Historian
HABS West Tennessee Project
Summer 1972

Robert C. Giebner
Project Supervisor
HABS West Tennessee Project
Summer 1972

Edited by: Susan McCown
HABS Historian
Summer 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1972 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the West Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, and Richard H. Hulan, project historian (Nashville).

The written data was edited in the Summer of 1985 by Susan McCown, HABS staff historian in the Washington, D. C. office, for transmittal to the Library of Congress.